

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9891

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TAGS: EAIR, ELAB, CA

SUBJ: CIVAIR: AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL SITUATION

REF: OTTAWA 2036

1. PRESS ACCOUNTS INDICATE TRANSPORT MINISTER LANG HAS PUBLICLY STATED HE IS OPTIMISTIC ALL ISSUES (INCLUDING LANGUAGE QUESTION) OUTSTANDING IN CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS WITH CATCA CAN BE SETTLED BEFORE MAY 31 DATE SET BY UNION FOR NATIONAL STRIKE. HOWEVER, SITUATION HAS NOW BECOME MORE COMPLICATED IN THAT QUEBEC GOVERNMENT HAS APPARENTLY ENDORSED THE POSITION THAT FRANCOPHONE CONTROLLERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE WITH FRENCH SPEAKING PILOTS OPERATING OVER QUEBEC.

2. ACCORDING TO MAY 21 MONTREAL GAZETTE ON PREVIOUS DAY: "SOLICITOR-GENERAL FERNAND LALONDE DECLARED THAT 'RACISM IS THE ONLY EXPLANATION' FOR ATTEMPTS BY ENGLISH-SPEAKING CONTROLLERS TO SUPPRESS BILINGUAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL.

"MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR APPLICATION OF QUEBEC'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGE ACT, LALONDE TOLD A NEWS CONFERENCE HE DECIDED TO SPEAK OUT ON THE ISSUE TO BALANCE THE
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PRESSURE ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FROM THE CANADIAN

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL ASSOCIATION WHICH THREATENS TO STRIKE OVER THE LANGUAGE ISSUE NEXT MONDAY.

"DENOUNCING THE 'RETROGRADE ATTITUDE OF THE ADVOCATES OF UNILINGUALISM,' THE MINISTER EMPHASIZED THAT FRENCH-SPEAKING CONTROLLERS ARE NOT ASKING THAT ENGLISH-SPEAKING PILOTS COMMUNICATE IN FRENCH AND SAID THEIR FIGHT AGAINST THE LANGUAGE WAS A CASE OF 'FLAGRANT INJUSTICE.'

"HE REJECTED CLAIMS OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING CONTROLLERS THAT BILINGUAL CONTROL IS UNSAFE, SAYING THE SAFETY ISSUE IS A MERE 'SCARECROW' WHICH IGNORES THE FACT THAT BILINGUAL AIR-GROUND COMMUNICATIONS ARE COMMON IN EUROPE.

" 'I GIVE THE GOVERNMENT'S FULL SUPPORT TO THE FRANCOPHONE CONTROLLERS AND I DO IT IN THE NAME OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE ACT,' LALONDE SAID.

" 'WE CANNOT REMAIN INDIFFERENT IN THIS MATTER, EVEN IF AIR COMMUNICATIONS ARE WITHIN FEDERAL JURISDICTION.'

"QUEBEC LAW MAKING FRENCH THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE AND THE LANGUAGE OF WORK MUST BE INFLUENTIAL EVEN WITHIN FIELDS OF FEDERAL AUTHORITY, HE SAID.

"LALONDE'S DECISION TO BREAK MONTHS OF PUBLIC SILENCE ON THE ISSUE FOLLOWED A MEETING WITH LEADERS OF THE ASSOCIATION DES GENS DE L'AIR, WHICH INCLUDES 150 QUEBEC-BASED AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS AMONG ITS 800 MEMBERS.

"OTHERS IN THE ASSOCIATION INCLUDE AIR CANADA TECHNICIANS WHO ARE FORCED TO WORK IN ENGLISH WHEN SERVICING AIRCRAFT AND LALONDE SAID HE HAS BEGUN A CAMPAIGN TO HAVE THE AIRLINE RESPECT THE LANGUAGE LAW.

" 'AIR CANADA DOES NOT GIVE FRENCH THE STATUS IT UNCLASSIFIED

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SHOULD BE ACCORDED BY THE LAW,' HE SAID."

3. COMMENT: LATTER POINTS IN ABOVE ARTICLE RELATE TO APRIL 20 AIR CANADA DIRECTIVE INDICATING THAT WHILE FLIGHT CREWS CAN USE FRENCH IN MANY SITUATIONS WITHIN THE AIRCRAFT, ONLY ENGLISH MAY BE USED FOR TECHNICAL CONVERSATIONS DEALING WITH FLYING THE AIRCRAFT. "IN THAT CASE, THE LANGUAGE OF AVIATION IS

ENGLISH", A SPOKESMAN FOR THE CARRIER WAS REPORTED
AS SAYING WHEN THE DIRECTIVE BECAME PUBLIC AND CAUSED
PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS.
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